

From the Great Goddess to Kāla

Jean Przyluski

The Sanskrit dictionaries distinguish *kāla* thus:

- 1 *kāla*, dark blue, black,
- 2 *kāla*, time, fate, death, god of death.

Kāla is also an epithet of Śiva, and *Kālī* is a form of Durgā. The first problem is to know whether *Kāla* means the Black god only and *Kālī* the Black goddess, or if those names allude to Time also, the destroyer of everything. This question is but one aspect of a more general problem: are *kāla* 'black' and *kāla* 'time, fate' two distinct words, or are there two different senses for the same word?

This is a very important problem for the history of Indian thought. Several authors have supposed¹ that Skr. *kāla* has been borrowed from the Dravidian *kār* 'black', and this origin is a likely one. If 'black, time, fate, death, etc.' were different senses of the same word, it would be necessary to ascribe a non-Aryan origin to an essential element of the religious and philosophical vocabulary.

In a recent article *The name Kalki* (n), published in the *Adyar Library Bulletin*, vol. I, part I, p. 21, n. 1, Prof. F. Otto Schrader has clearly adopted a position:

"There is in Pāli, by the side of the Sanskrit *kāla* 'time', a non-Aryan word for 'black', viz., *kāla*. But neither this nor Sanskrit *kāla* 'black' can have a common origin with Sanskrit *kāla* 'time', because the latter word was originally (in *R̥gveda* X, 42, v. 9 and the older Brāhmaṇa literature) used only in the sense of a definite or recurrent time (like Vedic *ṛ̥tū*) and but later employed in the abstract sense and that of the great Destroyer which led to its association with *kāla* 'black'".

This reasoning is not very convincing. *Kāla* 'time' is a late comer in Vedic literature. Because it has a definite meaning in certain religious texts, one cannot assert that it may not have been given a wider sense in the spoken language. It is in the Brāhmaṇas

¹ See C. Regamey, 'Bibliographie analytique des travaux relatifs aux éléments anaryens dans la Civilisation et les langues de l'Inde', BEFEO., 1935, index, s.v. *kāla*.

only that *kāla* is used, regularly enough, in the sense of *ṛtu*. It appears only once in later *Rv.* But in *Atharvaveda*, XIX, 53 and 54, it means already Time, the power of which is connected with Fate and the order of the world.

"Kāla generated yonder sky, Kāla also these earths; what is and what is to be stands out sent forth by Kāla.

.....all worlds by the *brāhman* having conquered, this Kāla goes on as highest god." AV., XIX, 53, 5 and 54 in fine.

'Black' and 'time, fate' are not the only senses of *kāla*. The *Divyāvadāna*, p. 617, reads thus: *tadyathā vastram apagatakālakaṇi rajanopagataṁ raṅgodake prakṣiptaṁ samyag eva pratigṛhṇiyāt evaṁ eva prakṛtir bhikṣuṇi tasminn evāsane niṣaṇṇā caturāryasatyāny abhisamayati sma.....*²

A similar formula is found again in *Dīgh. Nik.* (I, p. 110): *seyyathā pi nāma suddhaṁ vatthaṁ apagatakālakaṁ sammad eva rajanaṁ paṭiṇaṇheyya, evaṁ eva brāhmaṇassa Pokkharasādiṣṣa tasmim yeva āsane virajaṇi vitamalaṁ dhamma-cakkhuṁ udapādi.....*

The latter quotation has been translated by T. W. Rhys Davids (*Dialogues of the Buddha*, I, p. 135) in the following way:

"And just as a clean cloth from which all stain has been washed away will readily take the dye, just even so did Pokkharasādi, the Brāhmaṇa, obtain, even while sitting there, the pure and spotless Eye for the Truth....."

Pāli *kālaka* and Skt. *kālaka* mean not only 'black', but also 'stained (adj.), a stain (nt.)' and the extracts that we have just quoted link evidently together the notions of physical and of moral stain, of dirt and of sin. The opposition of the two colours white and black is doubled by the contrast: pure and impure.

One may probably connect with the same root Skt. *kalka* 'foulness, baseness, guile, sin', and *kaluṣa* 'dirty, impure, turbid; dirt, impurity.' If the origin of those words was an Aryan one, we could not without some difficulty connect *kalka* with *kāla*; but the moment one admits as the origin of those words a non-Aryan root *kāl*, every obstacle disappears: the quantity of the vowels, we know, can vary in borrowed words.

² Plato makes a similar comparison in *The Republic*, IV, 429 d, c.

'Dirty, guile, sin' suggest 'unlucky'. *Kali* is a die or the side of a die marked with one dot, and looked upon as inauspicious; by extension *kali* means the fourth and worst age of the world and *Kalki* (n) is the name of a mythical personage who is to appear during the Kali age. It seems impossible not to bring back all those words to the same root. *Kalki* (n), by its formation, can be compared to *kalka*. But other ideas have intervened in the formation of this derivative.

Marc Collins has connected with the moon the Skt. words *kāla*, *kalā*, *kalpa* and he has explained the sense of *kāla* 'dark, black, god of death' in connexion with the Dravidian name of the new moon.³ The same semantical relation can be observed in different Indochinese and Indonesian tongues. In Cham, *klam* means 'evening, night, darkness' and refers particularly to the nights of the second half of the moon. One can compare to the Cham word: Bahnar *klam*, Dayak *kalam*, Malay *kelam*. Without entering into a discussion here about the problem of the relations between the Dravidian and the Austric languages, let it suffice to observe that a root *kāl*, meaning 'black, obscure' may have been used to describe the dark fortnight of the lunar month and, by extension, the ultimate age of the world, that which leads to destruction and to death. This gives us new reason to connect with *kāl* 'dark, black', not only *kali* 'the fourth and worst age of the world', but *kāla* understood as Time, the destroyer and the god of Death.

In short, we find in India a dualistic system where two series of notions oppose each other:

white	pure	auspicious	bright fortnight	propitious god
black	impure	inauspicious	dark fortnight	terrible god and especially the God of Death.

3 'On the Octaval System of Reckoning in India', *Dravidic Studies*, n. 4, 1926.

If the root *kāl* meant all that is black and terrible, it may have served to describe the other terms belonging to the same series. The applications of such a principle in the religious domain are wider than is believed generally.

In the *Aśokāvadāna*, the nāgarāja Kālīka is evoked by king Aśoka during his pilgrimage to the holy places. The texts say that the king of the nāga went to Śākyamuni as he sat by the Bodhi-tree and began to praise him.⁴ In the *Mahāvamsa*, the same dragon appears before Aśoka, who subdues it and loads it with chains; it is called "Mahākāla, king of the nāgas, the power of which is marvellous, who has seen four Buddhas and lived throughout a kalpa."⁵ Here we have a Buddhist personification of Kāla, Time, in the shape of a nāga. Unlike that of Zrvan akarana, its reign does not last for ever; but the length of it is that of a *kalpa*.

One could trace in Hinduism and even in Indonesia the mythical figure of Kāla personified in the shape of a serpent. It will suffice to note here that in Iran the monstrous and fiendish serpent which is put to death at the end of world can also be found. According to the *Bundahishn*, the fight against the evil powers ends by the destruction of both Druj: Angra Mainyu and the Serpent (Až, that is to say Aži-Dahāk). Chained by the means of the girdle-formula (*afsāriha*) the serpent is finally burnt to death in the melted metal.⁶

In parallel with the traditions which show Kāla in the shape of the serpent, other beliefs associated him with the horse, either because the horse is his *vāhana* or because he appears like a horse himself.

In the first *Kālasūkta* of the *AV.*, "Time drives (*vah*) a horse with seven reins, thousand eyes, unaging, possessing much speed;

4 *Divyāv.*, p. 392. Cf. J. Przyluski, *Légende de l'Empereur Aśoka*, pp. 113, 114, 255.

5 Cf. *Mahāvamsa*, V, 87-92. In another part of the *Mahāv.*, chap. 31, v. 17 ff. Kālanāga seems to enjoy sovereignty over all the nāgas.

6 Analysis and critical study of the sources in Abegg, *Der Messiasglaube in Indien und Iran*, p. 218.

him the inspired poets mount; his wheels are all beings" (AV., XIX, 53, 1). In the following verse, it appears that Kāla "includes all those beings",⁷ so it is difficult indeed to distinguish the god, the wheels and the horse.

In later literature and iconography, Kalki is pictured as a horse, as a god with a horse's head or as a god riding on a horse.⁸

According to the Jainas, wicked kings named Kalkin and Upakalkin appear periodically during the periods of decline (*duḥsamā*): every 1,000 years comes a Kalkin, every 500 years an Upakalkin. Here *Kalkin* means probably 'wicked, unlucky', that is to say, it has the same value as Skt. *khala* 'wicked person, rogue'. We know that in borrowed words, *k* and *kh* can alternate.¹⁰ By their periodicity the Kalkin and Upakalkin of Jainism are evidently in relation to Kali and to the theory of the ages of the world.

In the Purāṇa, Kalki or Kalkin is an independent personage no more: he is absorbed in Viṣṇu, an *avatāra* of whom he becomes. In the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, four *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, named Kapila, Cakra-vartin, Vyāsa and Kalki succeed one another periodically during the successive *yugas*. In the *Kalkipurāṇa*, Kalki has become Viṣṇu's tenth *avatāra* and his legend has been partly modelled upon Kṛṣṇa's.¹¹ But before he has become a kind of Messiah and is identified with Viṣṇu, Kalki has probably had something to do with the destruction of the world; ever since the origin he is probably one of the forms of god of Death and of Time which destroys everything. And in the later forms of his legend, even, he remains connected with the Kali age and with the end of the world.¹²

7 This extract is discussed in Lanman-Whitney's *Ashtava-Veda*, VIII, p. 987.

8 Abegg, *ibid.*, p. 47 and plates.

9 Abegg, *Messiasglaube*, p. 140; Bhide., 'Is Kalkirāja a historical personage?' *IA.*, 48, 1919, pp. 123 ff.

10 Note that in Cham, *khāl* means 'mischievous, wicked, pernicious, fatal'; *khālam* 'illness'.

11 Abegg, *ibid.*, p. 140, n. 5, 137, 39 ff.

12 Otto Schrader tries (*ibid.*, pp. 23 ff.) to explain Kalkin by *kalha* 'white'

In short, a non-Aryan root attested in Dravidian has been borrowed by Indo-Aryan under different forms: *kāl-*, *kal-*, *kbal-*, *kāl-*, and this diversity in sounds added to the convergency of the senses is explained by the non-Aryan origin of this root. Between *kāla* 'black' and *kāla* 'time, destiny', then, a series of intermediates can be exposed, which form an uninterrupted chain: *kālaka*, *kalka*, *kaluṣa*, *kali*, *kalki*, so that one passes gradually from a concrete 'dark blue, black' to abstract and general notions 'time, fate, death.'

The question remains to be answered why a non-Aryan root, probably borrowed from the Dravidian, has attained such an importance in the religious vocabulary.

In the first section of the *Ādiparva* of the *Mahābhārata*, Sañjaya says to Dhṛtarāṣṭra: "Time createth all things and Time destroyeth all creatures". Elsewhere I have indicated that the double figure *Kāla* and *Kālī* is similar to the couple *Jara* and *Jarā* and that these doubles, like the hermaphrodites *Zrva*, are closely connected with a myth more ancient, I mean, than that of the Great Mother, goddess of reproduction and of death, all-powerful as *Destiny*.¹³ The excavations at Mohenjo-daro have proved that the Great Goddess was adored in India long before the Aryan conquest. She appears in Vedic literature at first under the name of *Aditi* which shows some connexions with the Near East.¹⁴

Later on, this unique figure shows a tendency to appear in different shapes, under the influence of different cultural tides. In some societies and particularly among the non-Aryan populations, the Great Goddess was still worshipped in her feminine shape. Elsewhere, under the influence of the patriarchal institutions, a mas-

and 'white horse' and concludes: "Our inquiry, then, lands in the alternative: either both names, *Kalki* and *Kalkin*, have emerged through the *Prākṛt* from a now lost Sanskrit original *Karkin*, or the incapability of explaining the earlier name *Kalki* (of Aryan or Dravidian origin) has caused the formation of its etymologically transparent double."

¹³ *IHQ.*, X, 1934, p. 429.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 413-414.

culine god takes her place. It seems likely that in the non-Aryan populations the Great Goddess, which orders destruction and generation, goddess of Death and of Desire, should at an early date have been given the shape of Kāli, the word being understood in its many acceptations: black, terrible, etc. On a parallel line with this, when a masculine god is seen to take the place of the goddess, Kāla is also worshipped, who is at the same time the Black, the Terrible and Time the destroyer.¹⁵ But notwithstanding the difference in sex, Kāli and Kāla are equivalent figures and which continue that of the Great Goddess. Their identity arises from the comparison between the Buddhist texts. In the verse 12 of the *Catalogue of the Yakṣa* of the Mahāmāyūri, the tutelar genius of Benares is Mahākāla whereas in the *Candraḡarbbasūtra*, 1, the patroness of the same city is Mahākāli.¹⁶ Kāla and Kāli appear here as local divinities. But their relation to Aditi prepared them to play the part of universal gods. In the Kālasūkta of the *AV.* Kāla is already the highest god. In the school of the Kālavāda he remains still an independent god, Fate or Time. Elsewhere he disappears finally in the wake of another great god: among the Śaivas, Kāla has become an epithet of Śiva; in Vaiṣṇavism, Kalki has become an avatāra of Viṣṇu.

We must refrain from simplifying this evolution where the local worships, the non-Aryan influences and contributions from the Near-East have had a share. The ideas attached to Kali and to Kalki(n) are in relation to the theory of the four ages of the world and this theory seems to have spread from the Near-East over India and over Greece. It is up to a certain point under this influence, probably, that a moral dualism, founded upon the oppositions: white—black, bright—dark, pure—impure, etc. has developed in India.

Indian eschatology includes two distinct myths: (1) the myth

¹⁵ It is not unnecessary to note that in *AV.*, XIX, the *Kālasūkta* comes immediately after the *Kāmasūkta*.

¹⁶ Cf. Lévi, 'Le Catalogue géographique des Yakṣa.' *JA.*, 1915, I, p. 120.

of the awful god which presides over the destruction of the world (2) the myth of the god of salvation who guides the Just to the abode of Bliss. The fact that the former god has taken the shape of a black serpent whilst the latter has sometimes been conceived as a white horse¹⁷ is in conformity with the principles of Indian dualism. In the most ancient texts where the name of Kalki(n) can be found, that is to say in Jaina literature, Kalki(n) is a nefarious being. This is why we have endeavoured to explain his name by the means of the non-Aryan root *kāl* 'black'¹⁸ and why we cannot agree with Prof. O. Schrader's opinion that Kalki(n) must be brought back to *karka* 'white'. Besides, we have just seen that Indian eschatology is founded upon a theory of the ages of the world where the final period, which bears the name of Kali, possesses ever since the origin a clearly marked unlucky quality. It is at a late period only that the terrible god and the solar god, the Destroyer and the Saviour have both been absorbed by the universal god: in certain texts, Kalki and the Horse are still described as two distinct avatāras of the god Viṣṇu.¹⁹

¹⁷ Cf. Otto Schrader, *ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁸ Abegg, *ibid.*, notes rightly that the records which picture Kalki as a destructive god with an animal shape come from the South of India, where the Dravidian element is predominant.

¹⁹ Abegg, *ibid.*, p. 51.

I have already proposed in 1929 to bring back to the same non-Aryan root the series *kali*, *kāla*, *kalki*, and I have noted that in Santali *kal* means foe, poison, snake and in general everything that is dangerous and must be avoided (*RHR.*, Jul.-Aug. 1929, pp. 8-9); I gave these senses after Campbell's *Dictionary*. P. O. Bodding's *Santal Dictionary* (Oslo 1935) brings back Santali *kal* to Hindi *kāl*, and Prof. Otto Schrader writes: "Santal *kal* 'time, age' and 'fate, death', etc., (see Bodding's *Dictionary*) and also *kal* 'snake' (cf. Sanskrit *kāla-sarpa*) are evidently but loan-words from the Indo-Aryan of which there are so many in Santālī". (*The name Kalki(n)*, *ibid.*, p. 21, n. 1). Things are not so evident. It is possible that the Santālī language may have grown poorer in the interval between the compilation of Campbell's and Bodding's dictionaries, as the former gave a much wider sense to *kal*. Any affirmation would be unwise until the comparative study of the Muṇḍā tongues, founded upon lexicons that we do not yet possess, has thrown some light upon their relation to each other and to the Dravidian tongues.